DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 608 SO 011 017

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TITLE MacBeth.
INSTITUTION Wright State Univ., Dayton, Ohio. Public Education Religion Studies Center.
SPONS AGENCY National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 10p.; For related documents, see SO 011 012-024
AVAILABLE FROM Public Education Religion Studies Center, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio 45431 ($1.00, paper cover)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Bound Students; *Drama; *English Literature; European History; Grade 10; *Learning Activities; Political Issues; *Religious Education; Secondary Education; Seventeenth Century Literature; Social Problems; Teacher Developed Materials; Teaching Techniques; Units of Study

ABSTRACT

This unit for 10th grade students on "Macbeth" is intended for college bound students. It was developed as a part of a series by the Public Education Religion Studies Center at Wright State University. In the seven-week unit, students examine the Elizabethan cultural background of Shakespeare's "Macbeth," including the political, social and religious problems of the period, particularly those reflected in the play. The religious aspect of Elizabethan culture is the focal point; however, political and social influences are included to avoid any artificial divisions. Background material is presented in the first four days of the unit, but references to that material and additional illuminating information are scattered throughout the unit. The student is helped to see that an author's initial and lasting impact depends on his ability to speak to the problems of his time in particular and to those of mankind in general. Concepts, generalizations, and subject matter are outlined in detail with references to specific acts and scenes in the play. Thirteen cognitive and affective objectives are stated along with nine suggested activities. Weekly quizzes, compositions, and a final exam are among the evaluation suggestions. The document concludes with instructional resources for the teacher and student, and with media resources. (Author/DC)

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MACBETH

prepared for
Tenth Grade English

by
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Northmont High School
Clayton, Ohio

for the
Teacher Education Institute on
the Religious Dimension of World Cultures
1976-77

sponsored by the
Public Education Religion Studies Center
Wright State University
Dayton, Ohio 45435

SO 011 017

and made possible by a grant from the
National Endowment for the Humanities

MACBETH

I. INTRODUCTION

As a portion of the year-long Sophomore Academic English course specifically designed for those who are college-bound at Northmont High School, students examine the Elizabethan cultural background of Shakespeare's Macbeth, including the political, social and religious problems of the period, particularly those reflected in the play. The study is structured so the student not only will gain more knowledge and insight from the play than he would have without the background, but also he will realize that an author's initial and lasting impact depend on his ability to speak to the problems of his time in particular and to those of mankind in general.

The Macbeth portion of the course is begun in late January, and the students by that time already have done similar background studies for Sophocles' Antigone and Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. In the unit on Antigone, studied the beginning of the year, a look is taken at the evolution of drama as a form of entertainment and, utilizing the ninth-grade study of mythology, as a form of worship. Sophocles' life is researched by the student, and the first two plays of the "Oedipus Trilogy" are lectured about but not read. In the second major unit of the year on Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck's "misfit" heroes are discussed as are the major themes of the so-called Dust Bowl genre of literature and the conditions giving rise to them. Therefore, students already have experienced to some degree the kinds of additional meaning that can be derived from studying a given work in light of its culture--in the case of Macbeth, late sixteenth century Britain through 1611. Examples of such "additional meaning" can be easily imagined: biographical criticism is helpful in understanding Sophocles' repeated use of sailing imagery when one learns that he was a naval officer, and Steinbeck's lauded naturalism is less awesome when one discovers that he grew up in the Salinas Valley shadowed by the Gabilan Mountains; criticism through examining world view (often called historical criticism) makes Polyneices' lack of burial even more horrifying in Antigone. Understanding world view helps clarify Steinbeck's theme that dreams of improving one's lot are needed, as all characters in Of Mice and Men illustrate. This third unit of the course centers on the religious aspect of the culture that produced Macbeth. Political and social influences are included as well, however, since to examine the religious dimension in isolation is an artificial division. In the seven-week Macbeth unit, the background material is presented in the first four days but references to that material and additional illuminating information are scattered throughout the unit whenever the play seems to reflect or comment upon its cultural backdrop of religious, political and social upheaval.

II. CONTENT

A. Concepts and Generalizations:

1. Literary works that are very popular in their own time deal with the problems/questions of that time.
2. Literary works that retain their popularity throughout time (i.e., become classics) deal with universal problems/questions of humanity.
3. These problems/questions are political/social/religious in nature, affecting both the public and private lives of leaders.
4. To understand any one aspect of a given situation--politics, society, religion--that aspect must be viewed in its broader cultural context. Each dimension is interactive with the other cultural dimension.
5. Although a work can be understood and appreciated on its own, knowledge of these problems and questions enhances understanding.
6. Personality studies help in prediction of behavior of a given character (person) in a given stress situation because behavior is a function of both the situation and the personality of the character (person).

B. Subject Matter:
1. Introductory material
a. Henry VIII and his marriages were only part of the reason for the break from Rome.
(1) The English householder's "Peter's Pence" tax, the fact that the Church of England was richer than the nation itself, and the problem of indulgences had enraged the people to the extent that Henry was able to get them behind him in his battle with the Pope over his annulment.
(2) Unlike its European counterpart, the English Reformation was more a matter of discontent with papal authority than differences of belief.
(3) The impetus for the break came when Catherine of Aragon, whom Henry had married with the help of a special papal dispensation, did not bear the king a son. Henry's desire for a male heir was not totally a selfish one; England's only experience with a queen (Mathilda) had been disastrous.
(a) According to the Elizabethans, the female determined the sex of the child.
(b) The male is the determining factor according to today's science.
(4) Catherine was followed by Anne Boleyn, Henry's marriage to whom brought much bloodshed as church leaders protested. Eventually, the monasteries were abolished. Anne was sent to the block for treason (unfaithfulness).
(5) Henry's third wife was Jane Seymour, who died bearing Edward VI.
(6) After Anne of Cleves was married to Henry for eight months, she was "retired from court" when it became apparent that the marriage was not as politically advantageous as had been expected. It had been hoped that her marriage to Henry would cement a Protestant alliance.
(7) Catherine Howard was Henry's fifth wife. She was executed, as was Anne Boleyn, for treason.
(8) Henry's sixth wife, Catherine Parr, outlived her husband.
(9) Henry's death left Edward VI as king, but the boy's precarious health resulted in rule by leftover advisors from the previous monarchy, according to American textbooks. English texts explain that Edward was a "brilliant young king" whose "tragic early death" made Mary's rule seem even more oppresive. The reign of Edward VI was strongly Protestant.
b. Queen Mary, the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon, ascended the throne after Edward's death.
(1) Mary was a staunch Catholic and made some moves to reunite her countrymen with Rome.
(2) She received her nickname "Bloody Mary" due to her propensity to condemn Protestant resistors to violent deaths.
c. Queen Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn, succeeded her half-sister.
(1) Elizabeth was a Protestant at least partially because the Roman Catholic church considered her illegitimate.
(2) Seeking to avoid the zealously Protestant years of Edward and the equally zealous Catholicism of Mary, Elizabeth allowed a limited purge of Catholics at the beginning of her reign, but then adopted a compromise position.
(3) Her success was more a matter of intelligence and leadership ability than of religion.
d. James VI of Scotland, a cousin of Elizabeth's, became James I of England upon her death.

B. Subject Matter (cont'd);

(1) For the first time England and Scotland were joined under one crown in 1603. Shortly thereafter Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, which fictionalized a historical link between the two.
(a) Macbeth is partially based on the Scottish legendary hero, McBeth.
(b) Macbeth contains much borrowed from R. Holinshed's Chronicles.

(2) James had an interest in the "forces of darkness" and had written a book on Satan's followers entitled Demonology.

(3) He would later commission the production of the King James Bible of 1611 in an attempt to unify the British Isles on a Christian foundation.

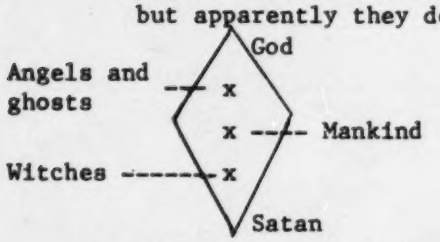
(4) Religious background all leads up to a principled bit of didacticism, a theme of Macbeth: "thou shalt not kill."

2. Material within the study of the play

a. Act I, Scene i - The play opens with a view of the witches in reference to King James' authorship of Demonology, a book concerning the occult and the "armies of Satan." The idea should be introduced that the enemies of God reverse the normal (Godlike) order of things ("fair is foul and foul is fair").

b. Scene ii - Ironically the title stripped from a traitor is conferred upon the hero--and traitor-to-be--Macbeth. Duncan's gratitude to his warrior is reflected by his subjects, but ultimately all of the nobles will turn against Macbeth's tyrannical sovereignty.

c. Scene iii - A more clearly painted picture of the witches now shows them to fit the popular superstitions of Shakespeare's day. Their place in the Elizabethan world view is between Satan and man, as evil as depicted in James' book, but not all powerful: they act on cattle and the weather, but apparently they do not cause plagues or mammoth tragedies.



A simplified version of the Elizabethan world view

d. Scene iv - When Duncan mentions the problem of knowing a person's heart by facial expressions, a connection can be drawn to the parallel problem of works versus faith, in those words' religious, social and political contexts.

e. Scene v - Any attempts at religious ties in this scene run the risk of bringing up the "innate evil and necessary subjugation of women" argument. Although many wedding ceremonies highlight this servant role, there seems to be no reason to bring Shakespeare into such an interpretation of Paul's letters, since: 1) England had just enjoyed a very prosperous monarchy under a woman, so it was doubtful Shakespeare intended it; and 2) the function of Lady Macbeth seems to be more one of pragmatic wife than evil woman. The scene's importance lies in its description of Satan as the ultimate evil to whom prayers can be offered just as to the ultimate good of God. Once again, this fits James' Demonology and the Elizabethan world view.

f. Scene vi - As in the Creation section of the soon-to-be commissioned King James Bible, the poetic description of Macbeth's castle by Duncan and Banquo is ironically peaceful and "Perfect." Shakespeare uses a similar passage in Hamlet. The point to be made is that this is "normal" poetry for that era and not "Bible talk" or a fiendish invention of English teachers.

B. Subject Matter (cont'd):

g. Scene vii - In light of Henry's dilemma over leaving a child to carry on one's name, Lady Macbeth's child analogy is particularly effective.

h. Act II, Scene i - The offstage sounds in this scene (howling, knocking, etc.) fit the Elizabethan superstition described by James in Demonology that nature knows when man is acting in Satan's behalf instead of God's. This idea is driven home throughout the remainder of Macbeth and many stories of the era. The Great Chain of Being world view is at root.

i. Scene ii - The principal point here is Macbeth's realization of his own damnation, as indicated by his inability to pronounce "amen" (a similar idea occurs in Hamlet) and by his wish that Duncan could be awakened.

j. Scene iii - The porter's mild blasphemy is as indicative of man (earth) as the previous scenes were of Satan (hell), so the relief is not only dramatic but religious. The philosopher-porter typecast is a favorite of Shakespeare's.

k. Scene iv - This scene, short as it is, presents two key points: 1) again nature reflects man's submission to Satan; 2) Macduff is the first to voice a sense of mistrust of Macbeth.

l. Act III, Scene i - Banquo now expresses his mistrust of Macbeth, and Macbeth, realizing he has forfeited his soul for nothing if Banquo's sons become kings (James I of England claimed Banquo of Scotland as one of his ancestors), plans the murder of the noble and his son, Fleance. Macbeth's lengthy discussion with his hirelings indicates the "morality of the murderer," as Alfred Harbage puts it. Significantly, James' attempt to unify Catholic and Protestant England was based on a similarity of morality rather than forms of worship.

m. Scene ii - Macbeth's remark about the peacefulness of death opens the door for discussion of an afterlife ("at rest with Duncan"). Other world views than the Elizabethan deserve discussion here.

n. Scene iii - Other than the concern for the safety of others shown here by Banquo and in Act IV, Scene ii, by Macduff's son, no real comment can be offered on this short scene. Its function is to depict Macbeth's resolve and to convey the fact that Fleance survived.

o. Scene iv - The sighting of the ghost by only Macbeth indicates his newness at crime as well as the idea of God as conscience. As the play proceeds, Macbeth no longer will be "haunted" by his victims or his conscience--the former if the student believes in ghosts, the latter if he does not. In the world view of Shakespeare's time, of course, Banquo's ghost is an "agent" of God.

p. Scene v - The theory of most critics is that this scene is a non-Shakespearean interpolation, and it is supported by the fact that the Elizabethan world view had no place for a Queen of Witches such as Hecate. The idea of a coven with a "head witch" had not yet evolved in 1605.

q. Scene vi - This scene is complimentary of England in a nationalistic sense as Lennox and the Lord hope for the English forces to come to their aid in the expedition against King Macbeth.

r. Act IV, Scene i - Once again the inversion idea is presented as the ingredients of the "firm and good" mixture are loathsome. Also, the conservative Christian position (as shown in the movie The Cardinal) on the problem of Caesarean birth (and now abortion) should be discussed here, in relation to the Macduff "bloody child" apparition.

s. Scene ii - Although short, this scene succeeds as had Act II, scene iii, in showing the decency of civilized life--that is, life under the influence of humanity, not under that of evil--in the innocent, jocular chatter

of Macduff's wife and child, before it presents a butchered child as the sign of the evil depth to which Macbeth has plummeted. It is rare for a death to occur onstage in Shakespeare as he follows the Greek example.

t. Scene iii - Malcolm's wordplay with Macduff over the importance of morality in rulers as he "confesses" to vices that can be found in Henry VIII, the advisors of young Edward VI, Mary, and in the early years of Elizabeth is important enough in itself, but this scene also is very worthy in its description of the court of England during the reign of Edward the Confessor. The legend of the healing of scrofula, the idea of the laying on of hands--particularly in light of its popularity in the born-again Christian movement of today--the obvious "goodness" of King Edward displayed not only by the doctor here but by the English tradition, and the effect of Malcolm's visit to the court reflected in his reformation plans (thanes to earls, division of influence, calling home of exiles) are all important points in this scene.

u. Act V, Scene i - The idea of the illnesses of the soul being more destructive than illnesses of the body surfaces here as Shakespeare moves from Edward's healing power to Lady Macbeth's state of living death, which according to the doctor can only be healed by God. Moving from that belief, the Divine Right of Kings (In which James strongly believed) can be discussed, along with the idea that many religious and national leaders the world over are often seen as at least semi-divine. One might note that in the Bible even Paul suggests that government is to be served and obeyed.

v. Scene ii - From here to the end of the play, the focus alternates between the converging forces of good and evil, Malcolm with his English help bolstered by the Lords of Scotland versus Macbeth's tyrannical evil ("his soldiers serve him without love").

w. Scene iii - That Macbeth's only visible followers are a nameless servant and Seyton (the homonym cannot be accidental) typifies his isolation from humanity. Question for discussion: Does solitude result from evil or cause it?

x. Scene iv - Here is the beginning of the solution to the riddles of the witches who, although they spoke only truth, allowed Macbeth to be misled as he wished. Trafficking with evil has left him nothing, since partial good (Malcolm, Macduff and Banquo were far from perfect) is to triumph over imperfect evil (Macbeth is not totally evil).

y. Scene v - Human as he is, Macbeth now makes the tactical error of leaving his fortress, sustained only by his misconception of the remaining riddle ("fear no man born of woman"), in his quest for the unattainable, true security.

z. Scene vi - Scene vii, line 34--The battle scene itself conveys two noteworthy points: that death while fighting is noble and good ("God's soldier be he"), therefore many critics feel that Macbeth should be killed fleeing Macduff (the stage directions are confusing) to show the contrast to Young Siward, and that Macbeth stands only on a promise made by the ministers of evil, a very infirm basis to the Elizabethan audience as well as to the majority of humanity.

aa. Scene vii, line 35 to end - This is the restoration of order according to the Aristotelian tradition as well as the reflection of the English influence seen in Act IV, Scene iii.

C. Vocabulary:

acceptance	diverge	papal bull	purge
apparition	earl	papal dispensation	sojourn
aside	ethos	persecution	soliloquy
Book of Common Prayer	Great Chain of Being	"Peter's Pence"	thane
deliberation	Holinshed's Chronicles	prophecy	tolerance
demeanor	indulgences	prophesy	intermediary
demonology	monarchy	prosecution	King James Bible
diabolical	papal authority		tyrannical
			world view

III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Cognitive Objectives:
Upon completion of the unit, the student should be able to:
1. Identify the varying policies of the English monarchs from Henry VIII through James I toward the different religious groups in England.
2. Outline Macbeth's deliberations over the killing of Duncan using quotes to indicate the stages of his dilemma.
3. Explain the significance of Malcolm's sojourn in the court of Edward IV in terms of the politics of Shakespeare's own era.
4. Summarize the pieces of evidence that indicate that Lady Macbeth committed suicide.
5. Apply the idea of a major personality trait to each of the principle characters of Macbeth explaining his/her actions in terms of that trait.
6. Characterize Lady Macbeth's demeanor when we first meet her by commenting on her first soliloquy.
7. Cite and explain at least three times when Macbeth, the alleged great general, made tactical military errors.
8. Reconstruct Act III in such a way that it will "work" dramatically without Scene V, retaining its supernatural allure without personification of evil. (Many critics say Scene V is an editorial insertion).
9. Forecast the success/failure of Malcolm's kingdom based on the knowledge of him from the play. Refer especially to Scene III of Act IV and the closing speech for support.
10. Appraise Macbeth as a tragedy of the Aristotelian order.
11. Consider the question, according to the Chekovian ideal, is there enough foreshadowing of Macbeth's decapitation? Be able to support your answer.

B. Affective Objectives:
1. Demonstrate initiative in working independently as indicated by surpassing minimum requirements on out-of-class research composition.
2. Demonstrate willingness to look at another world view without a pejorative attitude as indicated by class discussion.

IV. ACTIVITIES

A. Lecture-recitation-quiz over introductory material and the more difficult text passages.
B. Choral reading of witches' passages.
C. Discussion and in-class analysis of the text of the play.
D. Film: Polansky's Macbeth, rented.
E. Records: Interpretive readings of major soliloquies.
F. Small group discussion and presentation of personality trait/actions of character.
G. Individual research of background Elizabethan material (in addition to lecture), Aristotelian "Poetics," and belief in witches. Also any research needed for composition. The topic is student's choice.

H. Composition written outside of class. Form guidelines will be given, but content is up to the individual student.
I. Final essay exam completed in class.

V. Evaluation

(Sample questions and topics in all cases)
A. Weekly quizzes over knowledge and comprehension objectives:
   1. Which of Duncan's sons fled to Ireland and which to England?
   2. When Macbeth says "Stars, hide your fires,...," what is his intention concerning Duncan?
   3. What "power" was invested in Edward the Confessor of England?

B. Composition (Based on classwork and research. Can cover any/all of the higher objectives):
   1. Explain the function of the witches in Shakespearean tragedy.
   2. Explain Malcolm's final speech (or Macbeth's battle with Macduff), in terms of Aristotle's concept of tragedy.

C. Final Exam:
   1. Explain how Shakespeare reflected the personality and interests of James I of England in Macbeth.
   2. Critics have said that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are "two ships of evil passing without touching." Attack or defend this statement with support from the play.

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

(These are all available in the Northmont High School library.)
A. Teacher Resources:

Hall, Walter Phelps, Albion, R.G. and Pope, J.B. A History of England and the Empire Commonwealth. New York: Blaisdell Pub. Co., 1953.
This book is an old but very helpful guide in placing the monarchs and their beliefs, their acceptance by their subjects and the foreign influences on England in a clear perspective. It is very fair in its dealings with religious diversity.

Harbage, Alfred, ed. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961. Harbage's comments on Macbeth are helpful in cataloging background information under the themes of the play.

Kaufmann, Walter A. Tragedy and Philosophy. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1968. This entire book is a teacher resource. It relates Sophoclean and Shakespearean tragedy to Kaufmann's interpretation of Aristotle's tragic idea and later revisions thereof. The book's weaknesses are that it doesn't include Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man" and that Kaufmann uses a very vague, and therefore very broad, interpretation. Also, Kaufmann often fails to deal with religious factors where they seem to demand attention.

Tillyard, E.M.W. The Elizabethan World Picture. New York: Random House, 1959.
This brief and illuminating account of the ideas of world order prevalent in the Elizabethan age and later is an indispensible companion for readers of the great writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The book is useful for teachers and might be used by exceptional students.

B. Student Resources:

Abbott, J. Elizabeth I of England. New York: Harper and Bros., 1903.
This selection of the Harper Makers of History series helps to explain not only the worldwide implications of Elizabeth's intellect and wise choice of advisors, but that of Mary as well. Reading is somewhat difficult.

Aristotle, "Poetics," repr. in Levin, R. Tragedy, Plays, Theory, and Criticism. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960. This is the basic treatise, in abridged form for high school students, from which all notions of tragedy have evolved or been borrowed.

Chute, Marchette G. Shakespeare of London. New York: Dutton and Co., 1949.
This book is nothing more than a biography, but it enumerates several of the influences--political, social and religious--on Shakespeare's life and works. Easy reading for high school students.

Harbage, Alfred. A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1963. Harbage offers a good explanation of the text of the play, including some ideas on the witch editorial insert theory.

Ludowyk, Evelyn Frederick Charles. Understanding Shakespeare. London: Cambridge University Press, 1964. This book contains a fine description of the English situation at the time of Macbeth's release and the attempts on the parts of Shakespeare and the players to make the play fit that situation.

Miller, Arthur."Tragedy and the Common Man." New York Times, Feb. 27, 1949.
Miller offers his refinements of the Aristotelian notions of tragedy, including references to Oedipus, Orestes, Medea, Hamlet, Macbeth and Job. This is difficult but worthwhile reading for high school students.

Parker, Marion Hope. A Slave of Life. New York: Macmillan, 1955. Somewhat difficult reading due to Parker's extensive use of textual reference, but this book is the perfect aid for this style of study as it deals with Shakespeare's use of theology.

Price, George R. Shakespeare's Macbeth. Woodbury, New York: Barron's Series, 1966.
The Barron series is weak because of its failure to indicate nonliterary influences. The book on Macbeth could be a detriment to this kind of study; however, the introductory character sketches are quite good.

C. Media Resources:

Macbeth, color film, 34 minutes of 16 mm. Learning Corporation of America, New York, 3 days rental is $30, order must be received 10 days before showing.
In this shortened version of Roman Polanski's movie, Orson Welles comments on the tragic aspects of Macbeth, with comparison to other well-known tragedies.

"Shakespeare and the Elizabethans," Art and Man Series, National Gallery of Art, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975.
Though partially fictional, this booklet is very helpful in setting the social and political perspective for Macbeth in its discussion of Shakespeare's audience of the common man.